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CONDUCT AND DESTINY

PROFESSOR EDWARD I. BOSWORTH, D.D.
Oberlin Theological Seminary, Oberlin, O.

“He that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption, but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life.”—Gal. 6:8.

Paul solved the problem of giving glory to commonplace lives. He solved the problem by bringing each detail of life under the dominance of a high motive. In the context of these words from the letter to the Galatians he is hinting that the Galatian churches ought to pay their pastors or teachers more generously. To warn them against selfishness in this detail of life, he holds before them two great types of life, and the consequences of each.

Is it possible to sum up in a few sentences what Paul means by these four great words—“flesh,” “corruption,” “Spirit,” “life”—which had come to mean so much in his own personal religious life?

Flesh.—The flesh is the selfish instinct. Paul does not seem to consider the flesh itself to be sinful, but that which gives occasion to sin. Man is not sinful because he possesses the selfish instinct, but because he yields to it. It is *sowing to the flesh* that brings the terrible disaster mentioned here. The flesh, then, is that instinct in a person which rises up to demand its own gratification regardless of all other interests. It says, with the savagery of inherited animalism: “What I want I take.” The sin of yielding to the demand of this instinct, may show itself in ways that are openly brutal and repulsive, or outwardly cultured and polite. The savage may appear in his native nakedness or in evening dress. He may even look longingly upon the brotherly civilization of unselfish men and turn away from it regretfully, as did the rich young man who drew near to Jesus’ company for awhile with aspiration for the eternal life; but he turns away from it nevertheless, and decides to gratify his own tastes regardless of the interests of others.

Corruption.—The companion word of “flesh” is the word “corruption.” The sin of yielding to the “flesh” results in “corruption.” As surely as harvest follows seeding, so surely does “corruption” follow

the cultivation of the "flesh." What, then, is the corruption which necessarily results from gratifying the selfish instinct and developing it through gratifying it? The word "corruption" means "decay," "rotteness." It is the word by which Paul describes the wreckage of a personality. What he conceived to be the details of this wreckage he has not discussed at length. We are left to ascertain for ourselves what there is in the nature of selfishness that makes its necessary consequence the wreckage of personality. Perhaps there is no subject in our day that needs more earnest attention from all ministers and educators of public sentiment.

We live in an age that is peculiarly insistent in pressing back of phraseology and reaching facts. We must press back of the phraseology of Paul and inquire what actually happens to the personality that insists upon developing the selfish instinct. Although Paul does not discuss the question in detail, he here and there throws out significant hints. The consequence of developing the selfish instinct, and so disregarding the interests of others, is that the self becomes separated from other personalities. By psychological law, the continued failure to give interested attention to others produces inability to feel an interest in others. The selfish finally become "past feeling" and give themselves up greedily to the unclean work of gratifying the selfish instinct in all the savage forms in which it exhibits itself. ("Who, being past feeling gave themselves up to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness," Eph. 4:19.) This resulting isolation of themselves from other personalities involves, most of all, the separation of themselves from God. In their dull insensibility to the interests of others they are necessarily "alienated from the life of God" (Eph. 4:18), for he is steadily giving himself to the interests of others. In the earlier stages of their horrible development, while there is still some sense of God left, it is a hostile sense; "the mind of the flesh is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7).

Such separation of themselves from others results in their being left alone, shut up to themselves. Others may be all about them, but these others make no impression; and the selfish man is consequently far more fatally alone than he would be if far away from others in space, but wanting them in heart. He is condemned by the violated laws of his own being to solitary confinement.

"Thyself thy own dark jail.

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O doom beyond the saddest guess,
As the long years of God unroll
To make thy dreary selfishness
The prison of a soul."

Such isolation must involve pain. The fundamental dread of the soul, revealed in the little child's frightened cry in the night, or the mad rush of population to the city, is the dread of being alone. The solitary cell is one of the extreme punishments of modern penology.

Closely related to the pain of loneliness is the pain of idleness, aimless idleness. Idleness is a necessary consequence of isolation; for there is practically nothing that a person can do without the co-operation of others. Jesus, with his keen insight into the nature of life, expressed this when he said: "Of myself I can do nothing." The Johannine description of the man far on in selfishness is: "He walketh in darkness and knoweth not whither he goeth." He is alone in the dark. He knows no reason for going one way rather than another. All sense of direction, purpose, and destination is gone. The selfish person, by the natural laws of his being, must ultimately be without friends and without work. He putters away painfully and ever more feebly in his little, lonely, self-made hell. The capacity for friendship and work has apparently rotted out of his personality. His personality is a wreck. "He that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."

Spirit.—The "spirit" is that part of the personality which Paul strongly contrasts with the "flesh." It is the instinct that is interested in others, and cries out for alliance with them. It is that part of the personality with which the "Spirit of God" forms an alliance. Paul teaches that the spirit of the man who has believed in Jesus is received into a close alliance with the "Spirit" of God. When the believer's spirit has been thus reinforced, he is successful for the first time in bringing his life under the dominance of the unselfish principle, in spite of the strong insistence of the selfish flesh. Much that Paul says about the "spirit" is said when he has in mind the human spirit reinforced by the divine Spirit; and it is not always easy to ascertain which of the two, if either, is more prominent in his thought. This

accounts for the perplexity of the translators as to the propriety of writing "Spirit" or "spirit." That Paul really recognizes the human "spirit" as distinct from the divine "Spirit" is evident from the statement: "The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16).

Eternal life.—The natural consequence of developing the spiritual side of the personality, now energized by the Spirit of God, is "eternal life." What does Paul mean by "eternal life"? He means the restful adjustment of the human self to its personal environment. "The mind of the Spirit is *life* and *peace*" (Rom. 8:6). This adjustment of personal environment is first of all adjustment to God. The mind of the flesh is enmity against God; the mind of the spirit is alliance with God's Spirit. It is the projection of this present relationship with the Holy Spirit into the future that constitutes the eternal life of the future, for the presence of the Spirit is called the "first-fruits" of that for which we wait (Rom. 8:23). This idea of adjustment to God is involved in the frequently recurring phrase "in Christ." In the vital union with Jesus Christ, described by this phrase and involved in "faith," the believer finds God. It is the projection of this present fellowship with Christ into the eternal future that constitutes "eternal life." "So shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:17), is the brief sentence by which Paul describes the life to be. This adjustment of the personality to God, his Spirit, his Son, in loving friendship, involves also a similar relationship to man, for in Paul's teaching all God's law is summed up in one word: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Rom. 13:8-10). This Pauline view of life is in accordance with our modern attempt to define life as the adaptation of an organism to its environment. The principal part of a man's environment is made up of the persons that surround him, and that adaptation to them which constitutes "life" is love. Paul is at one here with the teaching of Jesus: "Thou shalt *love* the Lord thy God with all thy heart and thy neighbor as thyself. This do and thou shalt *live*" (Luke 10:27, 28).

Eternal life, then, consists in the great friendships with God and men which are to ripen in the age to come. The Pauline conception of life involves, not only adjustment to personal environment, which is friendship, but also adjustment to non-personal environment, which

involves work. In the Pauline teaching regarding a "spiritual body" in the age to come (I Cor. 15:44) there is provision for operation upon a so-called physical environment, or for work. These two fundamental aspirations of the human personality—the aspiration for friendship and the aspiration for achievement, or work—are necessarily involved in Paul's conception of life. Just as sowing to the "flesh," or to the selfish instinct, was seen necessarily to result in the painful loneliness of friendlessness and idleness, so sowing to the "spirit," or to the unselfish instinct, necessarily results in the increased capacity for, and enjoyment of, friendship and achievement, or work. The civilization of the age to come is a civilization of friendly workmen. Over against such a civilization, throbbing with faith, hope, and love, the eternally abiding centripetal forces of the ultimate civilization (I Cor. 13:13), is the anarchy of selfishness characterized by the great disruptive opposites of faith, hope, and love—distrust, despair, and hate.

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